

Banner Health | transcript

So our first question, Dr. Bessel, comes from Nicholas Gerbis from KJZZ radio here in Phoenix. Regarding vaccines, Dr. Christ has said there is a minimum gap needed between shot one and shot two. But, quote, "There is no maximum interval. And so, if you get vaccinated with your second dose on day 24, day 25, day 235, that is still considered a valid dose. And you will get that full protection," end of quote.

But we don't have studies that have actually looked at such large gaps. What should we tell listeners regarding the maximum delay allowable?

So at the Banner pods that we operate both within the state of Arizona and outside, we continue to look to the CDC and the EUA for guidance. And so, for Pfizer and Moderna that guidance is that you should get your dose within 21 or 28 days, depending on which manufacturer you get your dose from, plus or minus four days, which is how the studies were done.

In addition to that, CDC has offered guidance that the second dose could be delayed up to six weeks. At our PODs at Banner, we do make you a second appointment to follow those best practices.

And there is a second question to that first question. How do we calm fears that the second dose won't be available when needed?

So at this time, we all continue to work very collaboratively with the counties and the states with which we operate. And we again ask everybody to please look for those communications that are coming from the county or the state. If you come to a Banner pod as well as other pods that are operating at this time, most likely at this time you're going to get an appointment or an email notification to schedule your second dose. We encourage everybody to follow those instructions so that you can get your second dose.

We also know that there is a limited supply of vaccine. That's at the world level. That's at the national level. That's at the state level. And that is certainly at the county level. And so we'll all just need to be patient as we continue to work through this process.

In addition to that, it is very possible and likely that another manufacturer of vaccine may get authorization some time here in the first quarter of 2021. We will continue to bring updated information if and when that occurs.

Peter Samore from KTAR News here in Phoenix asks two questions. So I will read the first to you. How concerned are you about variants in the virus regarding cases and deaths?

So certainly what is emerging and is somewhat predictable during a coronavirus pandemic is that the virus will mutate. Some of the mutations appear to be out there already circulating in the United

States and in some of the states in which we operate. And we're getting some good information that the vaccine looks like it will still be efficacious against these variants.

This is an evolving and dynamic situation. And we are continuing to watch it very, very closely and carefully, and do expect that more information about this will unfold over the next weeks and months to come. Stay tuned. And we'll bring information as we become aware of it.

So the second question from Peter Samore, KTAR News-- how many patients are currently hospitalized for COVID-19 in Banner hospitals? And what percentage of the population do they make up?

So here at Banner Health, we continue in the state of Arizona to take care of about 45% to 50% of the total patients with COVID in the state. So if you go to the AZDHS dashboard and divide by two, that is about what Banner cares for each and every day.

I do not have today's exact percentage of what the COVID patients take up compared to our total population. We can get that to you after the press conference.

Stephanie Innes from *The Arizona Republic* asks, you mentioned that Arizona has the highest per capita rate of new COVID-19 cases. Why do you think, in your experience, Arizona ended up number one in the country? Was it inevitable?

I'm sorry. Was that number one in the country?

I'm sorry-- in the country.

OK.

I apologize.

Thank you.

I misread that.

So this is not the first time that Arizona very unfortunately has been at the top of that. If you remember back to our very significant summer surge, we also had very high cases and were number one in the world for a period of time when we were at the very, very peak.

There's still a lot to understand about what happens during the pandemic. And certainly we know that there's a lot that we could do to help mitigate, enforce, and take personal accountability. This was a

very difficult surge that we've all just crested over. And we're having a very slow decline.

So I'd ask everybody to assist with us with the messages that I continue to convey each and every week. Please continue to shrink your circles and wear your mask appropriately-- completely over your nose, your mouth, and cover your chin.

Carissa with 3TV CBS 5 here in Phoenix asks, has Banner lost staffers due to COVID concerns, exhaustion, or people taking time away from health care because of the pandemic.

So yes, every component of our health care delivery teams, whether you're at Banner or whether in the state of Arizona or whether you're in the country of the United States or worldwide are suffering from health care workers on the front line who have become exhausted-- emotionally exhausted, physically exhausted during this COVID pandemic.

Here at Banner, we continue to recognize and celebrate our frontline health care heroes-- those that are their leaders to help support during this pandemic and provide a myriad of support tools. It is unfortunate, however, that there are some in the workforce who have chosen to leave the workforce for the reasons that were asked in the question.

Our hearts go out to all of them on the front lines who have chosen to do that. And we hope that with some time and some rest, perhaps they can come back into the health care industry. We certainly need all of them. They're very skilled. They're very compassionate. And it is a loss for any one of them to leave the industry.

Carissa with 3TV CBS 5 also asks, how is Banner preparing for future surges.

So at this time, we continue to work on our decline from this surge, but also have made sure that we have tracked every single one of the interventions that we've done to be able to manage the most incredible surge that we just experienced, continued to on a day by day, hour by hour ability to operate, and continue to tweak and improve our processes.

If we were to have a surge, whether it's this pandemic or a future pandemic or anything else that might occur that requires our health care system to surge, we believe that we have the tools and the resources and the knowledge and experience to meet those demands.

A few minutes ago, Peter Samore from KTAR News had asked you, Dr. Bessel, about how concerned are you about variants in the virus regarding cases and deaths. So he has a follow-up question to that. He asks, could variants boost the estimated case and death counts that you provided.

Yes, they could. At this time, there are still a lot of unknowns out there about those variants. We are following them closely. And the IHME tool continues to be a good forecasting tool for us. And I expect that that will be adjusted over time as we learn more about those variants, what their transmissibility looks like, and whether or not the mortality rates go up or down related to those variants.

It's a very dynamic situation at this time. And I expect a lot more to surface about these in the upcoming weeks and months.

All right.

Stephanie Innes from *The Arizona Republic* asks, do you have any forecasts as to when Banner Health in Arizona may fully resume elective surgeries.

I do not. This is something that also is a dynamic process. And we take a look at our numbers and our forecasting each and every week. At this time, we continue to make those adjustments week by week. And also at each hospital level, they make adjustments. And some of those are done day by day.

If there are any of you out there that are a patient or a loved one of a patient who has had their surgery delayed or has an upcoming surgery, we recommend that you stay in close contact with your surgeon and your surgeon's office, who will have the most updated information about what is happening at the Banner hospital near you.

Liliana Salgado from Univision here in Phoenix asks-- and again this is in reference to the KTAR question about variants. How possible is it that the variant is already in Arizona among asymptomatic individuals that go untested?

It's very plausible that that has already occurred. As we've learned throughout the coronavirus pandemic, the virus travels fairly quickly across the entire world. And even though we may not have a confirmed case of it, it's very plausible that it is already here. Again, this is a very dynamic situation. We will continue to monitor it and stay close to it in the upcoming weeks to months. And we'll bring you updated information as it becomes available to all of us.